Risk Factors for Child Maltreatment Vary Across Maltreatment Type

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INTRODUCTION

- Child maltreatment types (physical, emotional, and sexual abuse; neglect) have been shown to be phenomenologically distinct and differentially associated with negative outcomes
- However, prior studies on child maltreatment risk factors have primarily examined child maltreatment broadly defined without considering differences across child maltreatment types
- Greater understanding of differences in risk factors for distinct child maltreatment types is critical to advancing targeted prevention efforts that reduce children's risk of harm
- Utilizing population-level data on active duty military families and a case-control retrospective research design, we examined differences in risk factors for four types of child maltreatment

METHOD

Sample and Procedure

- All active duty families with a child maltreatment incident that met Department of Defense criteria for child maltreatment in FY 2009–FY 2018 (*n* = 28,864) and a representative sample of control active duty families with one or more children under age 18 in FY 2009–FY 2018 (*n* = 589,417)
- Administrative records for service members and their dependents (spouses, children) were merged to create 1,070,510 family-month records

Outcome

- The **first occurrence of child maltreatment** within a family (inclusive of all child victims, maltreatment types, and abusers)

Predictors

- **Parent/Military Sponsor Characteristics:** Sex, Early parenting (< age 25 at birth of oldest child), Current age, Race, Ethnicity, and Education level
- **Family Characteristics:** Marital status, Number of dependent children, Military rank

Statistical Analysis

- Multivariate logistic regressions were conducted for each distinct maltreatment type in a discrete-time survival framework
- Models controlled for service branch, children at entry to active duty, fiscal year, and calendar month

RESULTS

- Figures 1–4 depict odds ratios and confidence intervals for parent and family characteristics associated with distinct maltreatment types

Figure 1. Odds Ratios for Risk Factors Associated with Neglect

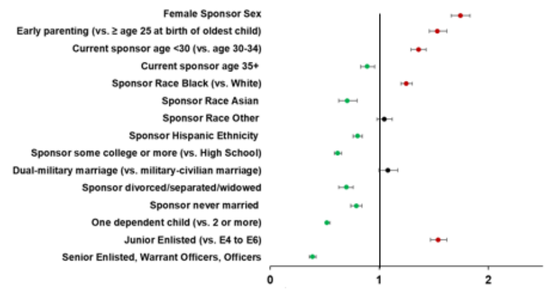


Figure 2. Odds Ratios for Risk Factors Associated with Physical Abuse

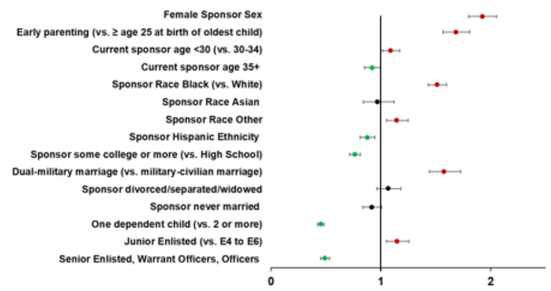


Figure 3. Odds Ratios for Risk Factors Associated with Emotional Abuse

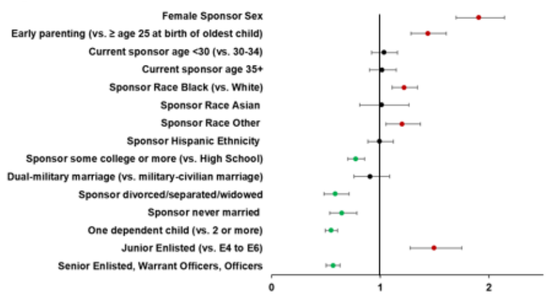
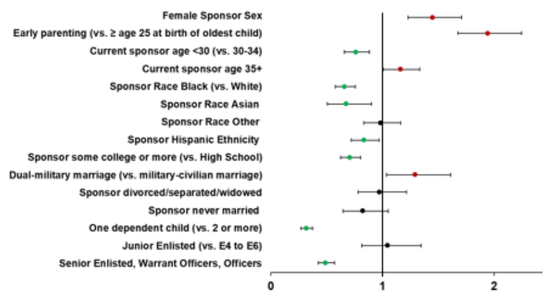


Figure 4. Odds Ratios for Risk Factors Associated with Sexual Abuse



Note. Values > 1 (red) = increased risk. Values < 1 (green) = decreased risk. The reference groups for multi-level comparisons are shown in parentheses.

DISCUSSION

- Several parent and family characteristics were associated with higher odds of all four child maltreatment types
  - female service member families
  - early parenting
  - lower parental education
  - larger family size
  - lower military rank
- The consistency of these results suggests that families with these characteristics are at high-risk for multiple types of child maltreatment and should be prioritized for prevention efforts
- In contrast, associations between the following characteristics and risk of child maltreatment varied across the maltreatment types
  - current parental age
  - parental race and ethnicity
  - marital status
- Prevention efforts for families with these characteristics may require more nuanced approaches to effectively address conditions that elevate risk for specific maltreatment types

CONCLUSIONS

- Results revealed both consistency and variation in parent and family characteristics associated with increased risk for distinct types of child maltreatment
- Findings identify the characteristics of families at risk for different types of child maltreatment who may benefit from targeted prevention and intervention services
- Additional research is needed to further delineate the specific conditions of each high-risk group that confer elevated risk
- Future research is also required to determine the needs of each high-risk group and how prevention programs can be tailored to address modifiable conditions that elevate risk for particular types of child maltreatment

DISCLAIMERS

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